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08/31/2022

Reading Response 2

In honesty, Margarita is my favorite character within the novel. Something that intrigues me and shows Margarita's exceptional attributes is the fact that, despite her surroundings and the Soviet propaganda which she is often subjected, Margarita is a particularly spiritual person. During her first meeting with The Master, she explains that she knew that she needed to meet him that day, that she had loved him long before she had met him and her need to carry the yellow flowers, ensuring that she would catch The Master's eye from within the crowd. While a majority of those around her spend their time strictly seeing the world through logical fallacies and mythical ideals, Margarita allows her instincts, guide her actions. Although, perhaps better named, her heart and soul. In doing so, she recognizes the value of The Master's work, the value of the Devil himself, as well as her own feminine power. While others might connect her descent into Hell to Dante's *Inferno*, Margarita's transformation into a witch calls forth thoughts of the Babylonian goddess, Ishtar. When her lover Tammuz dies and is taken to the Underworld, she descends into its depths to retrieve him and return him to the land of the living. This fertility goddess of love and war has been connected to the myth of Lilith, Adam's first wife. She is not only a mother of demons and monsters but has been labeled as a Queen of Witches. In more modern feminist philosophy and spirituality, she has been used as a symbol of a woman free of patriarchal binds and systems, granting freedom and riches to the women who worship her. This is comparable to the gifts she bestows upon her servant, Natasha. With all of this in mind, it is of no surprise that Margarita has a calming and disarming effect upon Satan and his entourage. She is given gifts, honest affection, and seems to be worshipped as a goddess. Margarita is more than a witch but is like a deity among them. Satan even shows his pain to her, the bruised and swollen knee that aches with the weight of the sins of

humanity. As a loving mother, or a supportive partner, Margarita soothes his wound and equally manages to carry the weight of his station as a King of Hell. She engages in life as it is, rather than in lies and myth, as opposed to her lover.

Because while The Master is meant to be a parallel to both Yeshua of the novel, as well as the biblical Christ, it is Satan who carries the weight of humanity's sin. He engages in the reality of the world around him, understanding that sin and cruelty is not unnatural but a fact of life itself. Despite The Master's mast work and loving heart, both The Master and Yeshua fail to see the harm and betrayal that surrounds him. He engages only in the kind and merciful, believing in the good in others. While this is an admirable trait, he fails to truly see humanity as it is, therefore incapable of truly being a Messiah. He cannot save humanity from their sin because he cannot identify its existence. The Devil can and does. While he may bear false gifts, he also extends forgiveness.

During Satan's ball, we are guided (alongside Margarita) through a procession of sinners and their misdeeds. While Margarita shares similarities with Satan, bearing the pain and understanding of the reality of the world and its cruelty, she does not share the same sins and pains of the others before her. Yet, this ball is not a condemnation of their crimes, but a celebration of them. Woland himself asks the following of Matthew Levi, disciple of Yeshua. "Kindly consider the question: what would your good do if evil did not exist, and what would the earth look life if shadows disappeared from it? Shadows are cast by objects and people … Do you want to skin the whole earth, tearing all the trees and living things off it, because of your fantasy of enjoying bare light?" This emphasizes the role of the ball itself. Evil is necessary, critical. Good and evil are co-dependent, one cannot exist without the other. Just as Woland cannot exist without Yeshua. As Peter S. Beagle might put it, "two sides of the same magic." Without the existence of evil, good would be meaningless. There cannot be light, without a darkness by which to measure its existence.

When finally granting Margarita's wish in exchange for her services, Satan is at first, somewhat offended. While he has no enemy in The Master, nor in Yeshua, is seems to me that his response is one of envy. Margarita is not only capable but excels in the same ways that Woland does. She manages the ball as a queen and sees the world exactly as it is, granting similar allowances to the world and its people. She can bear the same weight as he. Yet she has no desire to remain his queen, but to return to her lover, nothing more. She is suggested to be sin less and invokes a kind of sweetness in Woland, otherwise. Despite his envy, Woland grants her mercy and gifts her what she desires. He may show signs of condescension in the life of poverty that The Master desires to live, showing that he believes both he and Margarita deserve better but still grants them their wish.

Pontius Pilate's depiction is quite unique, as he is shown sympathetically. This is rather uncommon in biblical narratives, within modern fiction or actual scripture. Bulgakov ties the completion of his novel to The Master's. Both end with the same line "the cruel fifth procurator of Judea, the equestrian Pontius Pilate." This allows The Master to have the final word and suggests that the novel *The Master and Margarita* is also his work. Bulgakov's work belongs to Christ. The novel is a work of authenticity in art, as opposed to the state approved poets and writers, all who are punished in some fashion for their loyalty and greed to the Soviet government. This is also a suggestion that true art is something that can never be truly destroyed, as even Woland states when returning the manuscript to The Master. Through the life this art grants to its characters and concepts, there is an enduring strength and power in authentic art. By finishing the novel, The Master frees Pontius Pilate of the sin of cowardice that was already forgiven by Yeshua himself.

As far as the forward, the themes of the necessity of sin and the evil of cowardice are quite palpable, shining even further throughout the novel. Bulgakov emphasizes the harms that can be caused by not acting out, by not engaging in authenticity of one's beliefs and values, and by ignoring the necessary evil that still exists, despite this sin.